

“Growing up and Serious Mental Illness”

Report of a Seminar aimed at improving the lives of children and young people who experience serious mental illness.

Background:

Hafal’s Spring Seminar “Growing up and Serious Mental Illness”, held on the 13th May 2010, brought service users and key agencies concerned with child and adolescent mental health together in order to explore how collaboration can ensure that children and young people have timely, accessible and equitable access to services when they are most needed.

The Seminar focused on listening to first hand accounts of individuals who have experienced serious mental illness in childhood, adolescence and early adulthood in order to identify the key issues in both early and later onset of serious mental illness, and also heard from professionals involved in delivering care and support. This was achieved through a whole group debate which focused on the key issues faced by children, young people and young adults, as well as considering the policy context in which services occur. Solution-focused workshops covering specific issues also enabled discussion amongst service users, carers and key professionals regarding key priorities which need to be addressed.

This fostered a dialogue which identified how children and adolescents can be supported wherever possible in mainstream services while ensuring the availability of appropriate and timely care and support when serious problems arise.

The Seminar also marked the launch of Hafal’s response to the challenges faced by children and young people, namely; the appointment of a National Young People’s Lead and development of a Young People’s Information Hub. This response accompanies the production of this report which is aimed at improving the availability, quality and effectiveness of services supporting children and young people in Wales who experience serious mental illness.

Key messages from the Seminar:

1. Mainstream services (e.g. schools, colleges, youth services etc) need to be equipped to support young people with serious mental health problems.

In order to achieve this the Seminar identified that cultural changes are required in order for mainstream and statutory services to develop a shared understanding which will allow young people to receive adequate support. Education and training is needed for individuals working in mainstream services (schools, colleges, youth work environments etc) in order to be able to better support young people who experience mental ill-health. Further, collaborative working is required which will enable the identification of good practice which in turn will improve the standards of service received by children and young people. Extra resources are required, however, in order to ensure that mainstream services are adequately trained and have sufficient knowledge to support young people with serious mental illness. This is not a “one-size fits all” approach though and great care needs to be taken to avoid commissioning a single standard training package which does not take cognisance of local, cultural and language needs.

2. Services should be flexible and person-centred (CAMHS and Adult Mental Health) which meet the individual needs of children, adolescents and young people up to the age of 25.

In order to achieve this aim it was identified that services need to be consistent but flexible to meet the needs of children and young people. Services should be provided in environments which are non-stigmatising, at times which are suitable while a consistent appointment procedure and contact with a named member of staff can also help alleviate further distress and facilitate recovery, ensuring that children and young people are not pushed from “pillar-to-post”.

3. Responsibility should be taken to provide Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) up to the age of 18 across Wales.

Current inconsistencies in service provision due to educational status of young people across Wales exacerbates the existing gap between CAMHS and Adult Mental Health Services. In some areas services provide for all young people up to the age of 18, while in other areas services are only provided for those aged up to 18 if they are in full time school-based education. This results in many young people not being able to access services at times of most need. Greater collaborative working between CAMHS and Adult Services is required as well as equitability of CAMHS services to provide for all young people up to the age of 18 across Wales: this will serve to reduce this gap improving accessibility to timely, appropriate care. Furthermore, knowledge of the support available locally is required of mainstream services supporting young people in order to ensure that support/intervention is provided at the earliest possible opportunity.

4. An Early Intervention approach is required across Wales in order to ensure that young people receive appropriate and timely support.

This is essential in ensuring that children and young people up to the age of 25 receive support as soon as is possible. There is a responsibility for mainstream services to have sufficient knowledge and understanding – both of the issues which young people face and of the specialist services available locally – in order to seek appropriate support, while specialist services should ensure that appropriate support is provided in an effective, timely manner which enhances recovery. This does not mean a new team is required but rather existing services take an integrated approach with prompt, therapeutic engagement.

5. Appropriate inpatient support should be provided that is specific to each individual child or young person's needs.

Although progress is being made, there remains a priority to ensure that young people are not inappropriately placed on adult wards. Furthermore, support should be provided for children and young people on transition back into the community in order to enhance positive outcomes and recovery.

6. Children, adolescents and young people with serious mental illness should be involved in all stages of planning, reviewing and implementing their care and the services they receive.

It is essential that the experiences of children, young people and their carers are taken into consideration when planning services, and they should be actively involved in all stages of service planning and implementation. Focus groups for children and young people to put forward their views could also act as a tool which will further improve service design and implementation.

7. Appropriate information, advice and guidance for children and young people with serious mental illness should be developed.

Information, advice and signposting guidance should be available to young people that is free, accessible and designed by children and young people themselves. This will in part be addressed by Hafal's Big Lottery funded Young People's Information Hub project.

8. Mental Health Awareness should become a central feature of the PSE curriculum.

This will serve to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and will enable children and young people to access timely and appropriate support when it is needed. The information and training provided could be delivered by service users themselves rather than teachers or generic trainers, providing their own experiences of serious mental illness and providing positive peer role models for children and young people.

Hafal's Response – how we will take this forward

- Hafal recognises that the situation for children and young people is now the same as or better than it ever has been. However, it also recognises that further development is necessary in order to achieve equitable, timely and accessible services for all children and young people in Wales who experience serious mental illness.
- Hafal proposes to campaign on behalf of children and young people in order to ensure that the services received are appropriate for their needs.
- Through the appointment of a National Young People's Lead Hafal proposes to focus on extending its work with young people and expanding on partnerships with children and young people's organisations in order to support this group to achieve recovery.

- Furthermore, through its newly formed, Big Lottery funded Information Hub, Hafal proposes to develop accessible information, advice and guidance for young people in a variety of formats including social media. Hafal will develop this information based on the advice of a steering group of young people and key professionals.
- Hafal proposes to keep in touch with you to regularly update you about our work with children and young people across Wales.
- Hafal proposes to share good practice by listening to your ideas and suggestions and by disseminating information about how you are helping to improve services for children and young people with serious mental illness across Wales.

Update:

Following the publication of “Breaking the Barriers: Meeting the Challenges” – the Assembly Government’s Plan for providing better support for children and young people with emotional well-being and mental health needs Hafal will be publishing an accessible summary of the Government’s report together with a user response.

Contacts:

Young People’s Lead

Gavin Williams
01792 816600/07854240019
operations@hafal.org
Hafal
Suite C2,
William Knox House,
Britannic Way,
Llandarcy
SA10 6EL

Young People’s Information Officer

John Gilheaney
01792 816600
johngilheaney@hafal.org
Hafal
Suite C2,
William Knox House,
Britannic Way,
Llandarcy
SA10 6EL